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ABSTRACT

There is presently a wide gap between educational research and educational policy, which seems to result from the esoteric nature of much of the research as well as from the fact that policy is guided more often by economic or social concerns than by educational considerations. The results of a study of college impact on student development are discussed. The study provides an empirical basis for estimating the educational consequences of various policies. If policy should be designed to enhance the educational process, many policy changes in American higher education introduced since World War II seem almost paradoxical in light of this study. Seven such policies identified and discussed are: massive expansion of the public sector, the trend toward larger institutions, the near disappearance of single-sex colleges, the proliferation of public community colleges, the deemphasis on the residential experience, increased dependence on loans as a form of financial aid, and open admission. (JMF)

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American higher education has been studied intensively by educational researchers during the past twenty years, but this research has had little effect on educational policy. This gap between research and policy results in part from the esoteric nature of much research, and in part from the fact that policy is guided more often by ecomonic or social concerns than by educational considerations. For example, the major policy objectives that guided the expansion of the system during the 1950s and 1960s were to provide access for segments of the population not previously served by the system, and to produce more highly trained professionals for certain fields deemed important to national interests. The increased costs of maintaining an expanded system, coupled with severe economic problems, resulted in still another policy change during the early 1970s: to cut costs and to make higher education more "efficient" economically.

A recent large scale study of college impact on student development provides an empirical basis for estimating the educational consequences of various policies. If one assumes that policy should be designed to enhance the educational process, many policy changes in American higher education introduced since World War II seem almost paradoxical in the light of this study. One can identify at least seven such policy thrusts: massive expansion of the public sector, the trend toward larger institutions, the near disappearance of single-sex colleges, the proliferation of public community colleges, the deemphasis on the residential experience, increased dependence on loans as a form of financial aid, and open admission.

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The research that provides the principal empirical basis for evaluating these changes involved longitudinal analyses of data from more than 200,000 students attending a national sample of more than 300 higher educational institutions. The data, which involve several independent samples of students and follow-ups ranging from one to ten years after college entry, are from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) conducted jointly by the American Council on Education and the University of California at Los Angeles (Astin, King, & Richardson, 1976). The major purpose of this program is to assess the impact of different educational environments of the student's personal and educational development. The analyses included more than 80 cognitive and affective outcome measures covering areas such as cognitive development, values, attitudes, beliefs, daily behavior, career development, and satisfaction. Complex multivariate analyses were used to control for differences in entering students' abilities, aspirations, past achievements, personality, and family background. A unique feature of the study was the inclusion of special analyses for differentiating purely maturational changes from changes specifically attributable to the college experience. (Details of the analyses are reported in Astin, forthcoming). The implications of the findings will be discussed separately for each of the seven policy changes.

Expansion of the Public Sector. The extraordinary growth of American higher education since World War II has occurred almost entirely in the public sector. Until recently, this massive expansion has been carried out with little regard for its effects on private higher education. Consequently, private colleges have increasingly had to compete for students with low-cost public colleges. Since most of the operating revenues for private institutions come from tuition, those private institutions that have found it increasingly difficult to attract students have been

threatened with severe financial problems. Some institutions have actually closed. Since the expansion in the public sector has occurred primarily in institutions with permissive admissions policies, the private institutions most threatened have also been those than have traditionally attracted the less able students. As it happens, these institutions are also coping with the severest financial pressure (Astin and Lee, 1971).

What are the educational implications of these trends, given the findings of the student outcome study? Will students benefit from a system in which the public sector expands while the private sector remains stable or declines? Data from the recent study suggest a very different policy, if favorable impact on students is a desired goal for the higher educational system. Private institutions seem to foster greater student change than public institutions in almost all areas. In addition, students become much more involved in the educational process in private colleges and are more likely to implement career plans successfully upon graduation. Finally, students at private institutions are more satisfied with the quality of their instruction and with their relationships with faculty. The only areas where public institutions generate greater satisfaction is in the variety of courses offered and the emphasis on social life. In short, it appears that the net result of the massive expansion of the public system and the relative demise of private higher education is that the total benefits to college students have been diluted.

Trend Toward Larger Institutions. That the average size of American higher educational institutions has increased is, of course, partly a result of

the expansion of the public sector. Several factors are involved in the tendency for public institutions to become large. The most obvious is the need to serve a highly diverse constituency, a need that can presumably be met by offering a wide variety of courses and programs in the same institution. A more subtle influence is the general national tendency toward bigness and the assumption that bigger is somehow better. Many college administrators have gained national reputations primarily because their institutions have expanded under their leadership. A related incentive to continued expansion of institutions is that, as academic departments grow, the pressure to develop graduate or professional programs and to expand research activities also increases. Still another incentive is the belief in "economies of scale." This argument usually assumes that facilities such as libraries and gymnasiums can be more efficiently used with larger student bodies. These economies are largely illusory: Large institutions actually spend somewhat more per student for educational purposes than small institutions, the major reasons being the pressures for graduate and professional education, the complex administrative structure, and the increased research activity which usually results from expansion (Astin, 1976).

What do the findings of the present study say about the relative virtue of large and small institutions? When it comes to personality changes in students, there is little to choose between the two types: Large institutions tend to increase student liberalism, business interests, hedonism, and religious apostasy. They also increase support for student autonomy and increase the student's chances of demonstrating while in college. Small institutions foster a greater degree of altruism and intellectual self-esteem.

When it comes to student achievement and involvement, the results clearly favor smaller institutions: Students are more likely to participate in honors programs, to become involved with academic pursuits, to interact with faculty, and to get involved in extracurricular activities. At the same time, they are more likely to achieve in areas such as leadership, athletics, and journalism. Students in smaller institutions are more satisfied with their faculty-student relations and classroom instruction, whereas students in larger institutions are more satisfied with the variety of courses, the quality of the science program, and the emphasis on social life. In short, there are certain benefits uniquely associated with attendance at a small institution: the proliferation of large institutions during the past twenty years has reduced the average student's chances of becoming involved in campus life and of being on close terms with faculty. One aspect of this policy dilemma is whether large institutions can simulate smallness through cluster colleges or similar arrangements. Here is an important topic for future research.

Disappearance of Single-Sex Colleges. During the past ten years, colleges for men and colleges for women have increasingly become coeducational. Although various explanations have been provided for this trend, the most likely reasons are economic: Private institutions feel they can best maintain their enrollment and, hence, financial viability, by admitting students of both sexes. This trend toward coeducation has affected elite and nonelite colleges alike. The nonelite colleges became coeducational because they felt it would enhance their chances for survival. Although the elite colleges that used to be single-sex did not face extinction from failure to attract students, many felt that expanding their clientele would permit them to maintain their highly selective admissions standards. Whatever the reasons, only a handful of those institutions that were not coeducational in the early

1960s has been able to resist the temptation to become coeducational through the late 1970s.

Single-sex colleges show a pattern of effects on both sexes that is almost uniformly positive. Students of both sexes become more academically involved, interact with faculty frequently, show large increases in intellectual self-esteem, and are more satisfied with practically all aspects of the college experience (the sole exception is social life) compared with their counterparts in coeducational institutions. Men's colleges substantially increase the likelihood that men will carry out career plans in law, business, and college teaching; they also have a substantially positive effect on starting salaries in business. Women's colleges increase the chances that women will obtain positions of leadership, complete the baccaleaureate degree, and aspire to higher degrees.

Why single-sex colleges should show such a pattern of effects is not entirely clear. One possibility is that students are able to invest more energy in academic pursuits and in interaction with faculty because they have fewer opportunities to dissipate energy in courtship activities. In all likelihood, heterosexual activity is more circumscribed--confined to weekends, for example--in single-sex colleges. The greater interaction with faculty and greater satisfaction with the collegiate experience, despite the constraints on social life, could result from the greater sense of identification and communal feeling when both students and faculty are predominantly of the same sex.

Proliferation of Public Community Colleges. Since 1960 a large proportion of the growth in higher education has occurred through expansion of public community colleges. Not only has the number of such institutions increased dramatically since that time, but their enrollments have also

expanded. These institutions are designed to serve numerous constituencies: adults, part-time students, students not interested in academic degrees, as well as the traditional eighteen year-old coming directly from high school to pursue a baccalaureate degree.

While these institutions provide important services to adults, part-time students, and those pursuing technical careers which are not offered by four-year institutions, the results of college impact research suggest that they may not really serve the interests of students coming directly from high school to pursue careers requiring baccalaureate degrees. These students' chances of persisting to the baccalaureate are simply less at a two-year college than at a four-year college, public or private. These reduced chances of persisting also lessen the student's chances of implementing career plans in fields requiring baccalaureate training. Lack of residential facilities and the low student involvement in campus life partly explain low persistence rates, but even when these factors are considered, students have less chance of persisting at a community college than they do at some other kind of institution. This lowered persistence may be related to the problem of transferring: The paper work and physical move required to transfer from a two- to a four-year institution involve a certain amount of attrition, no matter how smooth the articulation mechanism. It may also be that the low degree of involvement and other aspects of the experience of attending a community college sometimes deter students from continuing on beyond the first two undergraduate years. Whatever the explanation, for the eighteen-year-old going directly to college from high school, the public community college does not represent an "equal educational opportunity" compared with other types of institutions. This pattern of results suggests that Clark's (1960) prophecy that the public community colleges are designed to play a "cooling

out function" for overly ambitious but less-well-prepared students has become a reality.

Why has expansion of American higher education been so heavily concentrated in the community colleges? There are at least two explanations: Educators in more established and prestigious institutions have probably supported community college growth because it represented a way of expanding educational opportunities which did not threaten their own selectivity and eliteness. Legislators have supported the expansion on the grounds that community colleges are less expensive.

Deemphasis on the Residential Experience. A number of public and private institutions embarked on major expansions of their residential facilities during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Federal and state support for construction spurred much of this expansion. This trend was almost entirely reversed in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, by at least two factors. First was the student movement of the 1960s which prompted many students to opt for living in private rooms rather than dormitories to escape parietal rules, a tendency encouraged when many institutions abandoned residence requirements. Second was the moratorium on public support for dormitory construction. The flight of students from dormitories reversed in the mid 1970s. Many dormitories now have waiting lists. This reversal has been stimulated by the demise of parietal rules as well as by economic factors: Some students may find it cheaper to live in dormitories than in private rooms. Except for a few colleges that have maintained a strong fundamentalist religious emphasis, residents in the 1970s are free of most behavioral constraints that characterized dormitory living in the 1950s and early 1960s.

The recent college impact study suggests that, from an educational viewpoint,

cessation of dormitory construction and expansion of places for commuters was a poor idea. (See also Chickering, 1975). In almost every respect, residents benefit more than commuters from their undergraduate experience. Residents not only show greater changes in personality and attitudes, but also become more involved in campus life. Most important is the increased chance of persistence which, in turn, maximizes the chance of implementing career plans. Residents are much more satisfied with their undergraduate experience than commuters.

Reliance on Loans for Financial Aid. Student financial support from both federal and state governments has increased tremendously in recent years, presumably in order to enable financially needy students to attend and complete college. One critical policy issue is what form this aid should take: loans, grants, or work-study programs. While loan programs have been a favorite of many policy-makers, research findings suggest that grants and, in particular, work-study programs are much more effective means for enabling students to complete college. Indeed, the evidence suggests that, for some students, loans act as a negative incentive to remain in college and that a student is better off with no aid at all.* Despite such findings, many policy makers have allowed work-study programs to diminish and have instead pushed to expand loan programs, presumably because the loan is a less expensive form of aid.

Open Admissions. Open admissions generally refers to a policy that allows students to be admitted to colleges without regard to academic preparation. Open admissions, in other words, represents an alternative to traditional selective admissions policies where only those students with

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*See also A.W. Astin, Preventing Students From Dropping Out (Jossey-Bass, 1975).

the highest high school grades and college admissions test scores are admitted. Open admissions has become a policy instrument of many public systems, the most notable the City University of New York, which adopted a modified open admissions policy in fall 1970 but, because of financial constraints, reversed the policy in 1976. Open admissions is a policy designed specifically to increase higher educational opportunities for those formerly excluded from higher education.

In most public systems of higher education, open admissions has really not been open in the sense that not all institutions within the system have adopted these policies. Even at the City University of New York, the number of less well prepared students that the four-year (more elite) institutions were expected to accept was limited. Two-year institutions absorbed most of those students who would have been excluded from the city system altogether. In other states (e.g., California), open admissions refers to the open-door policies of community colleges, and only the highest achieving students are admitted to the university. A few large state universities have implemented a system of open admissions that is not hierarchical: Any graduate of a public high school in the state is admitted to the state university (Tennessee is one example of such a system). For the most part, however, the burden of open admissions has been absorbed primarily by the community colleges and other less selective institutions.

Results of the present study indicate that the American higher educational system is not organized to meet the needs of the less-well-prepared student. High and low ability students already differ in personality behavior and aspirations when they first enter college, and these differences tend to persist or even expand with time. The better-prepared students generally go to better colleges, they more often live on campus, they get more involved in campus activities, they acquire a broader range of knowledge and

skills, they stay longer, they are more likely to persist to graduation and to attain their career objectives, and they are more satisfied with their undergraduate experience.

• The problems confronting the less well prepared student are exacerbated by a hierarchical public system in which open admissions is limited only to the lowest tier in the system--the community college. These students' relatively poor chances of completing a degree program are further reduced by the lack of residential facilities and few opportunities for involvement that characterize most community colleges. In a sense, *hierarchical public systems match the weakest students with the most limited educational opportunities.* High ability students, on the other hand, have access to all segments of the system, and usually opt for the most selective institutions. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that many freshman differences between high and low ability students expand with time: "Them that has, gets."

Economics, not Education

Virtually every educational policy that seems to conflict with the findings of educational research has been instituted for economic rather than educational reasons: Expand public systems because they are cheap and let the private colleges fend for themselves because they are expensive. Let institutions get larger and larger to provide "economics of scale." Expand community colleges because they are cheaper to operate than four-year colleges. Stop constructing dormitories because they cost too much. Abandon single-sex colleges because they are not financially viable. Prefer loans over work-study programs because they are cheaper. If nothing else, these contradictions underscore the fact that policy-makers are not likely to be influenced by research on student development, no matter what the findings show.

These realities leave the educational researcher with three alternatives: (1) try to change the policy makers' value system (a monumental task probably doomed to failure), (2) go back to the ivory tower and forget educational policy, or (3) play the policy-makers' game. This last possibility is especially seductive, because it raises the possibility of obtaining more grant funds and of becoming part of "policy scene" -with all the associated feelings of power and self-aggrandizement. Playing the policy-makers' game can take at least two forms. The first and most common form involves "telling them what they want to hear." A great deal of what passes for "policy research" really stems from the policy-makers' desire to accumulate "evidence" which supports a preconceived position. Findings that provide such support are embraced uncritically because they provide a "scientific basis" for the position, and contrary findings are either ignored or discredited. The complexities and imperfections of empirical research in the social or behavioral sciences makes it easy, if one is so inclined, to discount almost any unpalatable finding on purely technical grounds.

Playing the policy-makers game can take a somewhat less cynical form. Rather than simply telling them what they want to hear, researchers can accept the policy makers value system as a general starting point for the research. To be successful, this approach requires the researchers to accept two realities: (a) policy-makers in higher education pay little attention to research on student development because their interest in educational outcomes is usually minimal; and (b) most policy questions are concerned in one way or another with money: How to save it, how to invest it, how

to allocate it. The centrality of money in policy-making is perhaps the main reason the executive branch of the federal government has a Council of Economic Advisors but no council of social or educational advisors.

Now how does the policy researcher play the money game, without merely "telling them what they want to hear?" One approach is to find ways to translate educational findings into savings. For example, rather than arguing that we need more residential facilities or more work-study funds in order to reduce college attrition, researchers need to show that particular policies lead to reduced costs. Maybe their data will not allow them to do this, but maybe it will. For example, it might be possible to show that more residential facilities or more work-study funds would actually lead to real savings in terms of cost per degree produced. Take the two year college as an example. This "economical" form of higher education may not really be that economical. Even is one ignores the substantial capital costs of starting a new community college, the operating expenditures per student of many community colleges may actually be higher than those of some private colleges and only slightly lower than those of public four-year institutions (Astin, 1976). Indeed, if one calculates the cost per degree recipient, community colleges may in certain instances be more expensive than four-year institutions.

Or take the matter of dormitories. It would be a useful exercise to calculate the "costs and benefits" of dormitories measured by degree completion and implementation of career plans. Assuming that residential facilities, once constructed, can pay for themselves, is it possible that by amortizing construction costs over sufficient years, building more residential facilities would result in a new lowering of the costs of producing baccalaureate degrees? Again, this possibility

represents a challenge for frustrated policy researchers who would rather not retreat to the ivory tower. The really difficult problem, of course, comes when educational research fails to show that "cheaper is better". In much of education, one probably gets what one pays for: A watered-down educational experience will, more often than not, produce watered-down results. As long as policy-makers persist in viewing resource allocation as an end in itself rather than as a means for achieving educational ends, the gap between educational policy and educational research is likely to remain.